4:Lei-- E-5 (1939)1944 AE4 Lolo AE4

ANCESTOR WORSHIP OF THE LOLO IN CH'ÊNG-CHIANG, YUNNAN

By

Lei Chin-liu

Translated by

Lien-En Tsao

Pien-cheng Kung-lun /Frontier Affairs/, Vol. III, No. 9, (Sept., 1944), pp. 31-36

Bj la
P59
3

[P.1]

4:Lei--1 E-5 (1939)1944 AE4 Lolo AE4

Ancestor Worship of the Lolo in Ch'êng-chiang, Yunnan

The present article, taken from my manuscript "The Social Organization of the Lolo at Sung-tzu-yüan in Ch'êng-chiang, Yunnan," is Section 4 of Chapter III on "The Family". The investigation work was done in April and May, 1939, and the report was written in July of the same year, and later revised in the winter of 1943. 000'

It is conceded by men that after death a man leaves behind a disembodied spirit, either attached to some other body, or independently at large, freely floating around in this world or another. The spirit often lingers around its birthplace or burial ground, and possessing more powerful influence in spirit state than in human state, it brings either blessing or disaster to human beings. Since men fear disaster and long for blessing, they have devised spirit worship to avoid disaster and to court blessing. Passively, they respect the spirit but keep away from him; actively they exhaust all their intellectual resources to devise various symbolic acts and means to remain in good relationship with him. Men and their ancestors have a particularly intimate "parent-son" kinship which is different from any other relationship. Their affinity in this life continues into the next. Parents who in their lifetime "punish" and "protect" their children become influential spirits to dispense "disaster" or "blessing" after their death. This belief has generally persisted among men, and therefore ancestor worship has become an important form of spirit worship.

The Lolo in Yunnan believe so much in spirits that the official annal of that province 753

753 contains the following quotation from the Ch'u-hsiung Gazetteer:

> Any sickness taking place after the burial of deceased parents is attributed to the working of their spirits, and their graves have to be excavated in order to examine their bones to determine the extent of disaster.

776 This is just one example. The particular conception of the Lolo at Sung-tzu-yüan in Ch'êng-chiang regarding the spirits and ancestor worship is that after a man's death his soul still lingers in the shades, watching over his offspring and sending them "blessing" or "disaster" according to their goodness or badness in
769 filial piety. In every family are displayed the tablets for three generations of ancestors as well as the bamboo spirit and the pine spirit to represent all early ancestors. In the last twenty years they have come under the influence of Chinese customs and added to their household altar the spirit tablets of "Heaven, Earth, Lord, Parents, and Masters." Their ancestor worship has slightly changed with the change of times.

I. Burial Customs.

In many aspects, the customs of burial are closely related to ancestor worship, and to analyse them helps us to understand better the different phases of ancestor worship. We shall divide our study into five phases: (1) death, (2) funeral, (3) disposal of the dead, (4) graves, (5) mourning.

755 (1) Death. A man becoming sick never has
[753] the benefit of medicine. Sickness is considered as a disturbance of the spirits. When the spirit

is exorcised the sick person will get well. And so in case of sickness they ask a wizard priest to their home to pray and to drive away the evil spirit. If after several magic performances the person shows no sign of improvement, he is left to the will of Heaven, either to recover or to die. The official annal of Yunnan has the following to say: 755

> Sickness requires no medicine but consultation by the Pi-mo (Lolo word for the wizard priest) of the almanac to determine the date of birth and the date of sickness, as well as the symbolic animals such as cow, goat, pig, or chicken to which that particular date may belong. Accordingly prayer and sacrifice are made to one of these animals. (The Black Lolo)

/32/ The same annal further states:

> Sickness is not healed by medicine but by the magic of the wizard priest. (Tung-ts'uan Man)

Therefore, we know that for the Lolo the method of cure is not by medicine but by the magic of the priest. In the last decade, however, the Pi-mo as a cult practicer has gone out of existence at its Sung-tzu-yüan area, and there is no priest available for the purpose. On the other hand, a doctor of Western training, 757 one Mr. Tuan Hsin-wu, in Ch'êng-chiang has been in good relation with the Lolo villagers, and each time Doctor Tuan happens to be in the village the Lolo would ask him to attend to their sick. It can be seen that unconsciously [753] the Lolo have adopted a new point of view regarding sickness. But Doctor Tuan does not visit them too frequently, because of the

757 distance and the hazardous mountain journey, nor would they go to Ch'êng-chiang for medical treatment. And so in case of illness most of them still wait for the will of Heaven, either for spontaneous recovery or for the arrival of
763 the death spirit. Shortly before death, the sick person is removed from the bedroom to the front hall, where he is dressed in burial clothes to await his end. After death, messages are sent around to relatives and neighbors for them to come and help in post-mortem arrangements. If the deceased person is a woman, then her family has to be notified; otherwise there could be complaints from that direction.

[787] (2) Funeral. When an old man dies, within
764 the following two or three days the head of the family would consult a wizard priest or a "Yin Yang" specialist in Ch'êng-chiang for an auspicious day for the funeral. When the date is set the villagers are notified, and every family sends a young male member to help in funeral affairs such as moving the body, carrying the coffin, and building a funeral pyre. All those villagers younger than the deceased would come to burn incense and offer sacrifices to the departed spirit and to accompany the funeral cortege, which is led by a Taoist priest and two impersonated devils, one male and one female, wearing strange clothes and masks, followed by a few minor devils, beating drums and playing music. This procession is called "dispatching the Yin (spirit) lantern". Halfway along the journey the procession would halt, the drumming and music would cease, and the impersonated devils, who have fulfilled their functions, would stop parading. At the same time the female mourners would also discard their robes of mourning and squat on the spot to rest. The rest of the party would then proceed to the cremation ground or the burial ground. If the de-

ceased is an old man without heirs, there would be none at the burial and the ceremony would be very simple and cold. When a middle-aged man dies leaving heirs behind, his funeral would be the same as that for an old man leaving heirs. A dead man, regardless of his age, who has parents still living may not be kept in the house, but must be buried immediately. Children and those not of age, in case of premature death, are ordinarily not given a burial ceremony for the lack of heirs, their bodies being wrapped up in straw mats and taken away directly for cremation or burial. Dead infants under a year old are hung on the trees near the burial ground, where scorched by the sun and beaten by the rain, they become food for the birds, to disappear totally before long.

764

766

(3) Disposal of the Dead. Mankind has devised five ways to dispose of the dead body: 1) burial in the earth, 2) cremation, 3) burial in the water, 4) natural burial, and 5) embalmment. The Lolo at Sung-tzu-yüan dispose of their dead first by cremation and then by burying the bones and ashes in the earth. Thus cremation and burial are adopted simultaneously. About one li to the northeast of the village is a mound used as the cremation ground. All deceased persons from the village are carried according to established customs and rituals to this spot for cremation. A scaffolding of fuel wood is built on four sides to the height of three or four feet, and twigs of trees are then laid crisscross on the wooden scaffold. The dead body is carried to rest on the top of the framework as fire is set from the bottom by a brother of the deceased or one of the relatives. If the dead body cannot be kindled, it is believed that some devils must be giving trouble and his reincarnation will be affected. The filial son would then kneel before the scaffold-

764

764 ing, saying comforting words to the dead and praying for an early kindling. After cremation the bones and the ashes are picked up and deposited in a square stone hole or a small wooden box to be buried in the ground.

Cremation is a popular method of burial among the Lolo. According to the official annal of Yunnan the Lolo in many parts of the province all have the customs of cremation as shown in the following passages:

> The dead is wrapped in leopard skin and burned, and the bones are buried in the mountain. Those who are not his kinsmen do not know where the burial ground is. (Ts'uan Man)

> Burial - the rich are wrapped in tiger skin and the poor in goat skin: they are burned in the wilderness and their ashes are abandoned. (The Black Lolo)

/33/ The official Tung-chuan Fu Gazetteer says:

> Cremation - wrap the corpse like a monkey, and let men surge around the fire to shout and yell. When a chieftain dies, ride around on horseback with arrow and bow to attract the spirit. The sacrifice is performed by displaying the heart and liver of an animal on the tip of a bamboo while people dance and sing around the dead body. The filial son receives greetings; the filial daughter-in-law wears colored clothes. After the ceremony hang some personal articles of the deceased in the house or place them in the spirit hole. Recently, burial is being introduced.

Although these accounts vary, the reference

to cremation is the same. Cremation for the Lolo has a twofold meaning: first, fire destroys the devil or the evil spirit, who is thus prevented from entering another person; second, reincarnation is facilitated through cremation when the deceased becomes another human in next life. 764 [775]

In the recent decades the Lolo at Sung-tzu-yüan have gradually learned Chinese ways, and the majority are beginning to use coffins to deposit their dead, to be directly buried in the earth. Only those who die of leprosy, tuberculosis, and vicious tumors, and women who die of childbirth are cremated. This is because of their peculiar belief that the ones who die of leprosy and other contagious diseases may get rid of them through purification by fire. A woman who dies of childbirth is not easy to decompose, and if her body is not destroyed by fire, it may be entered by an evil spirit to come back to harm mankind. 764 177 766 751

(4) Graves. A grave is erected on the ground where the bones and ashes are buried after cremation. In shape a round mound of yellow earth, it looks like an inverted cup with green grass growing on the top. The ancestral graves of the three immediate generations receive sacrifices twice a year, in spring and winter. The Lolo have been so influenced by the Chinese that in the construction of their tombs they adopt Chinese designs. A comparatively rich Li family has built imposing graves for its ancestors, complete with tombstones with Chinese engravings. The following are two samples: 764 177 [765]

4:Lei--8 E-5 (1939)1944 AE4 Lolo AE4

764
177

Ancestral Virtues and Lofty
Administration

His Glory Shines on Many Future
Generations

Ting (south) Mountain Facing Kuei (north)

By the Imperial Ch'ing Dynasty

Posthumous Honors
to be Bestowed on

Li, tabooed name Teh, Deceased Father

Li Shih (Mrs.), Deceased Mother

This Tomb

Respectfully erected on the third
day of the third moon, in the third
year of Hsüan Tung, (1910)

By Grandson Li Hao (to be sacrificed
by imperial orders)
Great Grandson (Li) Wan-fu

May posterity grow and multiply

like the pine branches

4:Lei--9 E-5 (1939)1944 AE4 Lolo AE4

764
177

To Bless and Guide Your Offspring

Ting (south) Mountain Facing Kuei (north)

By the Imperial Ch'ing Dynasty

Posthumous Honors
to be Bestowed on

Li, tabooed name Hao, Deceased Father

Li Shih (Mrs.), Deceased Mother

This Tomb

Respectfully erected on the third day
of the third moon, in the third year
of Hsüan Tung, (1910)

By Son (Li) Wan-fu
Grandsons Tsan-kwei, Tsan-cha, Tsan-ku,
Tsan-ko, Tsan-lin

From the above it may be seen how the Lolo have imitated the Chinese way of life.

765

(5) Mourning. After the funeral the heirs and offspring of the deceased have the custom of observing a period of mourning, its length depending upon the degree of relationship. The son and the daughter observe thirty-five days of mourning, after which the mourning robes may be discarded. The grandsons and the granddaughters, younger brothers and sisters, and nephews observe seven days. One version

765 has it that sons, daughters and daughters-in-law have to observe one hundred days, and the other relatives seven days. For husband and wife, regardless of who dies first, there is no mourning observation. During the mourning period disputes and unpleasantness with others are to be avoided.

II. Ancestor Worship

769 After a man is buried a spirit tablet is erected before the family altar to receive sacrifices from his sons and grandsons. The ancestors entitled to spirit tablets in the house are limited to the three immediate generations, those beyond this range being represented by bamboo sticks and pine stalks. These latter are equivalent to the Chinese ancestral tablet engraved with words such as: "Spirit tablet for all ancestors of the preceding generations". It is said that the pine stalk, called "a tsa po", is their original ancestor; and that the golden bamboo stick, /34/ called "a tsa pha lo, no p'a a m", is their earliest original ancestor, i.e. the father of "a tsa po".

In case a member of the family dies, a new spirit tablet is added. In the meantime a wizard priest is invited to the house to remove the oldest tablet to a place called "min-chih" where sacrifice to the "a tsa po" spirit is made.

769 177 In Sung-tzu-yüan there are thirty-seven families of whom the family of Chiang Wen-tsai came from the strongly Chinese influenced Ta-wan village. No spirit seat is placed in his family hall. Instead, there is an inscribed tablet with words on both sides as follows:

(1) On the front: "To be posthumously honored, the spirit of the deceased father

Shun-shou, surnamed Chiang, with the tabooed name Kuo-si, by the filial son Chiang Wen-hsin." 769 177

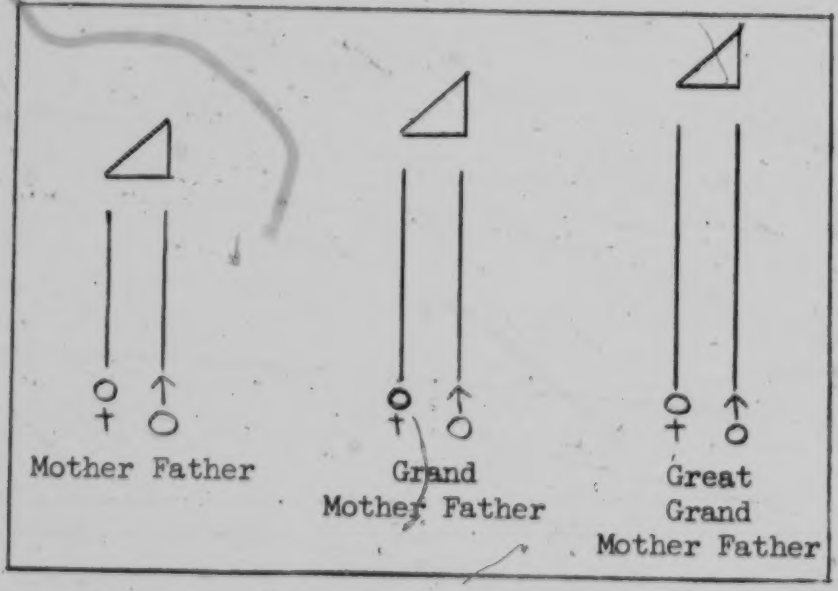
(2) On the front: "To be posthumously honored by the Ch'ing (dynasty), deceased wife Jen-p'ing, né Pi, enjoying the longevity of seventy-three years, by the weeping filial grandson Chiang Kuo-hsi."

Inside the tablet: "Born at the szu hour /9-11 A.M./ on a lucky day of a lucky moon, in the Kuei-wei year of Tao Kwang.

Inside the tablet: "Died at the szu hour on the fourth day of the fourth moon, in the jen-ch'en year of Kwang Hsu."

Besides the Chiang family, the other thirty-six Lolo families employ three paper banners to represent three generations of their ancestors: 769

The spirit tablets of ancestors for three generations:



769 The spirit seat of each ancestor is represented by a bamboo stick wrapped in cotton with a red feather or in colored paper. So the spirit seats for the three generations of ancestors are represented by six bamboo sticks, from left to right, ranged in different heights according to seniority. These are pasted against the wall (see preceding diagram), and are called in the Lolo language "no p'a a m" or abbreviated as "a m", meaning ancestor.

The spirit tablet consists of a quantity of ashes of the deceased after cremation, extracted by the wizard priest and wrapped into a bamboo stick. It is thought that after the magic ceremony the spirit of the deceased will enter into this stick.

769 177 Ordinarily, the spirit tablets of the ancestors are hung on the left side of the center wall in the hall. In some families they are hung on the dark, smoky chimney wall above the native stove. I have discovered that the Lolo at first placed their ancestor tablets in the darkest corner of the kitchen, but as the relation between the Lolo and the Chinese became more intimate, they began to learn more from the Chinese and removed their ancestral tablets to the hall.

764 The official Yunnan annal quotes a passage from the Hsuan-wei Chou /county/, Gazetteer, stating:

> The dead is covered with a felt skirt, enveloped with silk and satin. No coffin is used. .....On the third, fifth or the seventh day the body is cremated in the mountain with bamboo leaves and the roots of grass. A Pi-mo is hired to wrap /the ashes/ in a piece of silk tied with colored threads. The whole is then inserted in a bamboo tube, laid in a bamboo basket, and

764

placed for sacrifice in a dark corner of the house. Three years later this spirit seat is deposited together with the other ancestors. (The Black Lolo)

Again, according to the Huang-Ch'ing chih-kung t'u /Sketches of tributes to the imperial Ch'ing dynasty/:

> Buried without coffin, the dead body is wrapped in a piece of fire hemp.....and burned in the mountains. After cremation, (the people) blow the horn and wave the flag to summon the soul back. A bit of cotton is wrapped around a bamboo slip; it is then placed in a bamboo cage and hung above the beds of the living. (The White Lolo)

The custom of using the bamboo stick or the bamboo tube as the spirit tablet of the ancestor is derived from the belief that the bamboo is the retreat of the ancestral soul. This conception persists not only among the Lolo in the vicinity of Ch'êng-chiang but among this tribe in all parts of Yunnan province.

III. The Golden Bamboo Ancestor

769

To recognize a stick of "golden bamboo" as one's ancestor is very odd indeed! It is also nonsensical to regard a stick of bamboo as the retreat of the ancestral soul and to use six sticks of bamboo /35/ to represent three generations of ancestors. However, a widespread custom or belief is not formed suddenly: it has its history and foundation. What is the reason of all this? It is best to trace the origin of the customs to find an explanation. First of

769 all, let us turn back to the second section of this chapter on the relationship between parents and children.[1] The first sub-section on the birth of children has the following:

858 842 782 769 Although their feeling towards children seems to be rather indifferent, ...yet in case of childlessness the barren woman would go to the bamboo mountain at Hsü-chia-tu to beg the clan spirit (a cluster of golden bamboo) for a son. After worshipping and offering prayers she would sleep in the temple.

According to this conception the number of children one has or whether one has any at all is predestined by the clan spirit. The childless woman can go and beg from him. But this spirit is no other than a cluster of golden bamboo, and the name of the place where he resides 773 is the bamboo mountain. Thus, according to the Lolo, bamboo is the original source of mankind. In other words man is born from the bamboo, and they believe that their ancestors and they themselves have a blood relationship with the bamboo.

Secondly, if this assertion of their belief in the blood relationship with the bamboo is not far wrong, we can draw on the mythology concerning the origin of the White Lolo in the border regions of Yunnan and Kwangsi to help us understand this relationship.

> In very ancient times, along the Han river there floated a tube of fragrant bamboo. When the tube reached the river bank it exploded and a man appeared. The man, whose name was "a tsa", was able to speak as soon as he was born..... He lived in a hole underground, and subsisted on wild fruits and hunting. One day as he took a

[1] [This section has not been translated.--Analyst]

wooden spear and went to Ma-ta-po to hunt, 773
he saw sleeping under a pear tree a female monkey with the appearance of a dog. At first he was afraid and dared not approach. But seeing that she was not moving, he gathered enough courage and slowly approached her. He picked up a stone and hurled it at her. The monkey did not move. He moved close to her body and passed his hand over her. Before long their instincts were excited, their hearts united, and in that wilderness on the grass they became husband and wife. Their descendants are the Lolo. (1)

1. See my article "A Glimpse of the White Lolo on the Border between Yunnan and Kwangsi," The Travel Magazine, Vol. 18, No. 6.

This myth has clearly revealed to us 771
that the original ancestor of the Lolo, 773
called "a tsa", was born from a fragrant bamboo tube. In other words the fragrant bamboo was their earliest ancestor. Afterwards "a tsa" married a dog-shaped girl sleeping under a pear tree and gave birth to the Lolo people. Therefore, they worship fragrant bamboo; the men make sacrifices with "bamboo incense urn" and the women with "dog-bamboo incense urn". (2)

2. See my article The White Lolo in Chên-pien hsien, Kwangsi, and their Totemic Remains," Kung-yü sheng-huo, special ed., "Kwangsi Folk Customs."

771, 778 If we want to be further clarified on this point we may examine the following account of their "bamboo worship" custom derived from this story.

> Their (White Lolo) village is always characterized by a vacant lot of about twenty feet square, on which is planted a cluster of fragrant bamboo in the center. At the foot of the bamboo is laid a circle of huge rocks, each about five feet in diameter. Outside the rocks is erected a bamboo fence of more than ten feet in height. At ordinary times no one is allowed to cut the fence or otherwise damage it. But on the twenty-fourth day of the fourth moon each year according to the lunar calendar they remove the bamboo fence and erect a platform in front of the fragrant bamboo for a great sacrificial ritual. .....This cluster of divine bamboo they call "Me Wa dcc /?/", meaning fragrant bamboo incense. The vacant lot on which the bamboo is planted is known as "di ka", or the field of cultivation. They believe that the flourishing and decline of the bamboo indicate like tendencies in their tribe. Therefore, with a view to assuring the prosperity of their tribe, they constantly worship the bamboo with a devout heart and communicate with "her" through elaborate sacrificial rituals and symbolic contacts with the spiritual media. They appeal to her and promote her in order to secure the prosperity of their descendants. If not, she may wither, and danger and catastrophe will befall them and their tribe will decline and even perish. (3)

3. Same as note 1.

Comparing this account of bamboo worship by the White Lolo with the worship of the clan spirit by the Lolo of Hsü-chia-tu in Ch'êng-chiang, we can see that the latter's clan spirit on the bamboo mountain and the former's fragrant bamboo in the field of cultivation as well as the bamboo mountain and the field of cultivation themselves /36/ are all one and the same thing. 771 778

To summarize the foregoing observations it may be said that the Lolo regard the bamboo as having a blood relationship with them and even as their ancestor. Thus, it is clear why the Lolo in Ch'êng-chiang regard the "golden bamboo" as their progenitor, the bamboo stick as the retreat of their ancestral spirits, and the six bamboo sticks as their ancestors of three immediate generations. The essential point is that the bamboo represents their origin of birth as well as their destination after death. Where one comes from, there one goes; and this symbolic principle is identical with our belief that from earth man was moulded and to earth he must return after death. 771 769

IV. The Pine Grandfather

Having discussed the golden bamboo ancestor, let us now describe the tree ancestor. The trees here referred to are the pine and the pear. Generally speaking, they worship the tree ancestor even more intensely than the bamboo. There are numerous traces of the worship of the former, which can be analysed briefly as follows.

(1) The pine tree is regarded as their common forebear because they believe that there is a blood relationship between them and this tree. The pine that has been acknowledged as their original ancestor is called "a tsa po", which tallies with the "a tsa" in the creation

771 legend of the bamboo ancestor described previ-
769 ously.[1] It is similar to the idea of regarding an animal or plant species as the totemic being of a race or tribe and the belief in the blood relationship between these species and the constituent members of the tribe. As to the pear tree which is often connected with the pine and similarly worshipped, it is supposed that it has certain affinity with that pear tree under which the girl slept in the story of "a tsa".

778 (2) To the left of their village there is a
796 forest called min-chih, (people's area), in
769 which there are a few tall pine and pear trees. These are regarded as the spirits of "a tsa po". The third day of the third moon every year the elders of the village would lead all the males of the village over twelve years old to offer sacrifices to these gods. The participants each break a branch of pine or pear tree and plant it at the foot of the large pine tree. During the sacrificial ceremony girls over twelve years old are barred from witnessing it. The pine and the pear trees in the vicinity of the "people's area" are out of bounds, and those violating their sanctity and breaking even a small branch are subject to severe punishment. From this we may gather that they impart a spiritual meaning to the pine and pear trees in the "people's area".

771 (3) They call the pine ancestor "a tsa po";
769 they also call themselves in the Lolo language "a tsa po". From this similarity in the name of their tribe and that of their pine ancestor, it may be supposed that they use the pine tree as their tribal name.

Summarizing the above three points, it may be said that their custom of worshipping the pine tree is closely related to totemism.

524. Aside from the worship of plants which can
771 be traced to totemism handed down from ancient

[1] [See category 116, pp. 13-15. -- Analyst]

4:Lei--19 E-5 (1939)1944 AE4 Lolo AE4

times, the following two other conditions may also give rise to the worship of pine and pear trees. (1) In their high mountains and deep valleys no other objects could have inspired more awe and terror than the huge, lofty, majestic pine and pear trees that arouse in them an illusion of grandeur and reverence. Sometimes these trees seem alive as the leaves rustle and the branches sway in the winds; at other times miraculous incidents occur that give them a sense of awe and worship and the belief that these are inhabited by spirits. From this belief they developed rituals of worship. (2) Occupying an area of lean earth unsuited for crops and living a hard life, they find that the pine and the pear trees are prolific in their yields as sources of timber and fuel. As main staples of wealth these play an important part in their economic life. Thus their economic necessity and the economic importance of the trees have given rise among these primitive people to the cult of plant worship.

Furthermore, totemism is at the same time a social system. In their present ancestor worship, although we discover certain traces of totemism, there are no evident signs of a social system. Therefore, whether the worship of pine and pear trees actually belongs to totemism depends upon the evidence of more reliable materials in a future study.